RELIGIO LAICI

OR A

Laymans Faith.

A

POEM.

Written by Mr. DRYDEN.

Ornari res ipsa negat; contenta doceri.

LONDON,

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AS heretofore *Richard* was set in opposition to *Baxter*, and *Baxter* to *Richard*; with much greater Reason now may *John* be oppos'd to *Dryden*, and *Dryden* against *John*; for let any Rational Man read his *Religio Laici*, and he may therein certainly find Arguments sufficient to baffle all that are offer'd in the *Hind and Panther*.

THE

PREFACE.

A Poem with so bold a Title, and a Name prefix'd, from which the handling of so serious a Subject wou'd not be expected, may reasonably oblige the Author, to say somewhat in defence both of himself, and of his undertaking. In the first place, if it be objected to me that being a *Layman*, I ought not to have concern'd my self with Speculations, which belong to the Profession of *Divinity*; I cou'd Answer, that perhaps, Laymen, with equal advantages of Parts and Knowledge, are not the most incompetent Judges of Sacred things; But in the due sense of my own weakness and want of Learning, I plead not this; I pretend not to make my self a Judge of Faith, in others, but onely to make a Confession of my own; I lay no unhallow'd hand upon the Ark; but wait on it, with the Reverence that becomes me at a distance: in the next place I will ingeniously confess, that the helps I have us'd in this small Treatise, were many of them taken from the Works of our own Reverend Divines of the Church of *England*; so that the Weapons with which I Combat Irreligion, are already Consecrated; though I suppose they may be taken down as lawfully as the Sword of *Goliah* was by *David*, when they are to be employed for the common Cause, against the Enemies of Piety. I intend not by this to intitle them to any of my errours; which, yet, I hope are only those of Charity to mankind; and such as my *own* Charity has caus'd me to commit, that of *others* may more easily excuse. Being naturally inclin'd to Scepticism in Philosophy, I have no reason to impose my Opinions, in a Subject which is above it: But whatever they are, I submit them with all reverence to my Mother Church, accounting them no further mine, than as they are Authoriz'd, or at least, uncondemn'd by her. And, indeed, to secure my self on this side, I have us'd the necessary Precaution, of showing this Paper before it was Publish'd to a judicious and learned Friend, a Man indefatigably zealous in the service of the Church and State: and whose Writings, have highly deserv'd of both. He was pleas'd to approve the body of the Discourse, and I hope he is more my Friend, than to do it out of Complaisance: 'Tis true he had too good a tast to

like it all; and amongst some other faults recommended to my second view, What I have written, perhaps too boldly on St. *Athanasius*: which he advised me wholly to omit. I am sensible enough that I had done more *prudently* to have follow'd his opinion: But then I could not have satisfied my self, that I had done honestly not to have written what was my own. It has always been my *thought*, that Heathens, who never did, nor without Miracle cou'd hear of the name of Christ, were yet in a possibility of Salvation. Neither will it enter easily into my belief, that before the coming of our Saviour, the whole World excepting only the Jewish Nation, shou'd lye under the inevitable necessity of everlasting Punishment, for want of that Revelation, which was confin'd to so small a spot of ground as that of *Palestine*. Among the Sons of *Noah* we read of one only who was accurs'd; and if a blessing in the ripeness of time was reserv'd for *Japhet*, (of whose Progeny we are,) it seems unaccountable to me, why so many Generations of the same Offspring, as preceeded our Saviour in the Flesh, shou'd be all involv'd in one common condemnation, and yet that their Posterity shou'd be Intitled to the hopes of Salvation: As if a Bill of Exclusion had passed only on the Fathers, which debar'd not the Sons from their Succession. Or that so many Ages had been *deliver'd over* to Hell, and so many *reserv'd* for Heaven, and that the Devil had the first choice, and God the next. Truly I am apt to think, that the revealed Religion which was taught by *Noah* to all his Sons, might continue for some Ages in the whole Posterity. That afterwards it was included wholly in the Family of *Sem* is manifest: but when the Progenies of *Cham* and *Japhet* swarm'd into Colonies, and those Colonies were subdivided into many others; in process of time their Descendants lost by little and little the Primitive and purer Rites of Divine Worship, retaining onely the notion of one Deity; to which succeeding Generations added others: (for Men took their degrees in those Ages from Conquerours to Gods.) Revelation being thus Eclipsed to almost all Mankind, the light of Nature as the next in Dignity was substituted, and that is it which St. *Paul* concludes to be the Rule of the Heathens; and by which they are hereafter to be judg'd. If my supposition be true, then the consequence which I have assum'd in my Poem may be also true; namely, that Deism, or the Principles of Natural Worship are onely the faint remnants or dying flames of reveal'd Religion in the Posterity of *Noah*: And that our Modern Philosophers, nay and some of our Philosophising Divines have too much exalted the faculties of our Souls, when they have maintain'd that by their force, mankind has been able to find out that there is one Supream Agent or Intellectual being which we call God: that Praise and Prayer are his due Worship;

and

and the reſt of thoſe deducements, which I am confident are the remote effects of Revelation, and unatainable by our Diſcourſe, I mean as ſimply conſidered, and without the benefit of Divine Illumination. So that we have not lifted up our ſelves to God, by the weak Pinions of our Reaſon, but he has been pleaſed to deſcend to us: and what *Socrates* ſaid of him, what *Plato* writ, and the reſt of the Heathen Philoſophers of ſeveral Nations, is all no more than the Twilight of Revelation, after the Sun of it was ſet in the Race of *Noah*. That there is ſome thing above us, ſome Principle of *motion*, our Reaſon can apprehend, though it cannot diſcover what it is, by its own Vertue. And indeed 'tis very improbable, that we, who by the ſtrength of our faculties cannot enter into the knowledge of any *Beeing*, not ſo much as of our *own*, ſhould be able to find out by them, that Supream Nature, which we cannot otherwiſe define, than by ſaying it is Infinite; as if Infinite were definable, or Infinity a Subject for our narrow underſtanding. They who wou'd prove Religion by Reaſon, do but weaken the cauſe which they endeavour to ſupport: 'tis to take away the Pillars from our Faith, and to prop it only with a twig: 'tis to deſign a Tower like that of *Babel*, which if it were poſſible (as it is not) to reach Heaven, would come to nothing by the confuſion of the Workmen. For every man is Building a ſeveral way; impotently conceipted of his own Model, and his own Materials: Reaſon is always ſtriving, and always at a loſs, and of neceſſity it muſt ſo come to paſs, while 'tis exercis'd about that which is not its own proper object. Let us be content at laſt, to know God, by his own Methods; at leaſt ſo much of him, as he is pleas'd to reveal to us, in the ſacred Scriptures; to apprehend them to be the word of God, is all our Reaſon has to do; for all beyond it is the work of Faith, which is the Seal of Heaven impreſs'd upon our humane underſtanding.

And now for what concerns the Holy Biſhop *Athanaſius*, the Preface of whoſe Creed ſeems inconſiſtent with my opinion; which is, That Heathens may poſſibly be ſav'd; in the firſt place I deſire it may be conſider'd that it is the Preface onely, not the Creed it ſelf, which, (till I am better inform'd) is of too hard a digeſtion for my Charity. 'Tis not that I am ignorant how many ſeveral Texts of Scripture ſeemingly ſupport that Cauſe; but neither am I ignorant how all thoſe Texts may receive a kinder, and more mollified Interpretation. Every man who is read in Church Hiſtory, knows *that* Belief was drawn up after a long conteſtation with *Arrius*, concerning the Divinity of our Bleſſed Saviour, and his being one Subſtance with the Father; and that thus compil'd, it was ſent abroad among the Chriſtian Churches, as a kind of Teſt, which

who

whoſever took, was look'd on as an Orthodox Believer. 'Tis manifeſt from hence, that the Heathen part of the Empire was not concerned in it: for its buſineſs was not to diſtinguiſh betwixt Pagans and Chriſtians but betwixt Hereticks and true Believers. This, well conſider'd, takes off the heavy weight of Cenſure, which I wou'd willingly avoid from ſo venerable a Man; for if this Proportion, *whoſoever will be ſav'd*, be reſtrained onely, to thoſe to whom it was intended, and for whom it was compos'd, I mean the Chriſtians; then the Anathema, reaches not the Heathens, who had never heard of Chriſt, and were nothing intereſſed in that diſpute. After all, I am far from blaming even that Prefatory addition to the Creed, and as far from cavilling at the continuation of it in the Liturgy of the Church; where on the days appointed, 'tis publickly read: For I ſuppoſe there is the ſame reaſon for it now, in oppoſition to the Socinians, as there was then againſt the Arrians; the one being a Hereſy, which ſeems to have been refin'd out of the other; and with how much more plauſibility of Reaſon it combats our Religion, with ſo much more caution to be avoided: and therefore the prudence of our Church is to be commended which has interpos'd her Authority for the recommendation of this Creed. Yet to ſuch as are grounded in the true belief, thoſe explanatory Creeds, the *Nicene* and this of *Athanaſius* might perhaps be ſpar'd: for what is ſupernatural, will always be a myſtery in ſpight of Expoſition: and for my own part the plain Apoſtles Creed, is moſt ſutable to my weak underſtanding; as the ſimpleſt diet is the moſt eaſie of Digeſtion.

I have dwelt longer on this Subject than I intended; and longer than perhaps, I ought; for having laid down, as my Foundation, that the Scripture is a Rule; that in all things needful to Salvation, it is clear, ſufficient, and ordain'd by God Almighty for that purpoſe, I have left my ſelf no right to interpret obſcure Places, ſuch as concern the poſſibility of eternal happineſs to Heathens: becauſe whatſoever is obſcure is concluded not neceſſary to be known.

But, by aſſerting the Scripture to be the Canon of our Faith, I have unavoidably created to my ſelf two ſorts of Enemies: The Papiſts indeed more directly, becauſe they have kept the Scripture from us, what they cou'd; and have reſerv'd to themſelves a right of interpreting what they have deliver'd under the pretence of Infallibility: and the Fanaticks more collaterally, becauſe they have aſſum'd what amounts to an Infallibility in the private Spirit: and have detorted thoſe Texts of Scripture, which are not neceſſary to Salvation, to the damnable uſes of Sedition, diſturbance and deſtruction of the Civil Government. To begin with the Papiſts, and to ſpeak freely, I think them the leſs dangerous (at least,

least in appearance to our present State; for not only the Penal Laws are in force against them, and their number is contemptible; but also their Peerage and Commons are excluded from Parliaments, and consequently those Laws in no probability of being Repeal'd. A General and Uninterrupted Plot of their Clergy, ever since the Reformation, I suppose all Protestants believe. For 'tis not reasonable to think but that so many of their Orders, as were outed from their fat-possessions, wou'd endeavour a re-entrance against those whom they account Hereticks. As for the late design, Mr. *Coleman*'s Letters, for ought I know are the best Evidence; and what they discover, without wyre-drawing their Sense, or malicious Glosses, all men of reason conclude credible. If there be any thing more than this requir'd of me, I must believe it as well as I am able, in spight of the Witnesses, and out of a decent conformity to the Votes of Parliament: For I suppose the Fanaticks will not allow the private Spirit in this Case: Here the Infallibility is at least in one part of the Government; and our understandings as well as our wills are represented. But to return to the Roman Catholicks, how can we be secure from the practice of Jesuited Papists in that Religion? For not two or three of that Order, as some of them would impose upon us, but almost the whole Body of them are of opinion, that their Infallible Master has a right over Kings, not only in Spirituals but Temporals. Not to name *Mariana*, *Bellarmine*, *Emanuel Sa*, *Molina*, *Santarel Simancha*, and at the least twenty others of Foreign Countries; we can produce of our own Nation, *Champian*, and *Doleman* or *Parsons*, besides many are nam'd whom I have not read, who all of them attest this Doctrine, that the Pope can Depose and give away the Right of any Sovereign Prince, *si vel paulum deflexerit*, if he shall never so little Warp: but if he once comes to be Excommunicated, then the bond of obedience is taken off from Subjects; and they may and ought to drive him like another *Nebuchadnezzar*, *ex hominum Christianorum Dominatu*, from exercising Dominion over Christians: and to this they are bound by virtue of Divine Precept, and by all the tyes of Conscience under no less Penalty than Damnation. If they answer me (as a Learned Priest has lately Written,) that this Doctrine of the Jesuits is not *de fide*, and that consequently they are not oblig'd by it, they must pardon me, if I think they have said nothing to the purpose; for 'tis a Maxim in their Church, where Points of Faith are not decided, and that Doctors are of contrary opinions, they may follow which part they please; but more safely the most receiv'd and most Authoriz'd. And their Champion *Bellarmine* has told the World, in his Apology, that the King of *England* is a Vassal to the Pope, *ratione directi Dominii*, and that

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he holds in Villanage of his Roman Landlord. Which is no new claim put in for *England*. Our Chronicles are his Authentique Witnesses, that King *John* was depos'd by the same Plea, and *Philip Augustus* admitted Tenant. And which makes the more for *Bellarmine*, the French King was again ejected when our King submitted to the Church, and the Crown receiv'd under the sordid Condition of a Vassalage.

'Tis not sufficient for the more moderate and well-meaning Papists (of which I doubt not there are many) to produce the Evidences of their Loyalty to the late King, and to declare their Innocency in this Plot; I will grant their behaviour in the first, to have been as Loyal and as brave as they desire; and will be willing to hold them excus'd as to the second, (I mean when it comes to my turn, and after my betters; for 'tis a madness to be sober alone, while the Nation continues Drunk:) but that saying of their Father *Cresi*: is still running in my head, that they may be dispens'd with in their Obedience to an Heretick Prince, while the necessity of the times shall oblige them to it: (for that) (as another of them tells us,) is onely the effect of Christian Prudence, but when once they shall get power to shake him off, an Heretick is no lawful King, and consequently to rise against him is no Rebellion. I should be glad therefore, that they wou'd follow the advice which was charitably given them by a Reverend Prelate of our Church; namely, that they would joyn in a publick Act of disowning and detesting those Jesuitick Principles; and subscribe to all Doctrines which deny the Popes Authority of deposing Kings, and releasing Subjects from their Oath of Allegiance: to which I shou'd think they might easily be induc'd, if it be true that this present Pope has condemn'd the Doctrine of King-killing (a Thesis of the Jesuites) amongst others *ex Cathedra* (as they call it) or in open Consistory.

Leaving them, therefore, in so fair a way (if they please themselves) of satisfying all reasonable Men, of their sincerity and good meaning to the Government, I shall make bold to consider that other extream of our Religion, I mean the Fanaticks, or Schismaticks, of the English Church. Since the Bible has been Translated into our Tongue, they have us'd it so, as if their business was not to be sav'd but to be damn'd by its Contents. If we consider only them, better it had been for the English Nation, that it had still remain'd in the original Greek and Hebrew, or at least in the honest Latine of St. *Jerome*, than that several Texts in it, should have been prevaricated to the destruction of that Government, which put it into so ungrateful hands.

How many Heresies the first Translation of *Tyndal* produced in few years, let my Lord *Herbert*'s History of *Henry* the Eighth inform you; insomuch

Insomuch that for the gross errours in it, and the great mischiefs it occasion'd, a Sentence pass'd on the first Edition of the Bible, too shameful almost to be repeated. After the short Reign of *Edward* the Sixth (who had continued to carry on the Reformation, on other principles than it was begun) every one knows that not onely the chief promoters of that work, but many others, whose Consciences wou'd not dispence with Popery, were forc'd, for fear of persecution, to change Climates: from whence returning at the beginning of Queen *Elizabeth*'s Reign, many of them who had been in *France*, and at *Geneva*, brought back the rigid opinious and imperious discipline of *Calvin*, to graffe upon our Reformation. Which, though they cunningly conceal'd at first, (as well knowing how nauseously that Drug wou'd go down in a lawful Monarchy, which was prescrib'd for a rebellious Common-wealth) yet they always kept it in reserve; and were never wanting to themselves either in Court or Parliament, when either they had any prospect of a numerous Party of FanatiqueMembers in the one, or the encouragement of any Favourite in the other, whose Covetousness was gaping at the Patrimony of the Church. They who will consult the Works of our venerable *Hooker*, or the account of his Life, or more particularly the Letter written to him on this Subject, by *George Cranmer*, may see by what gradations they proceeded; from the dislike of Cap and Surplice, the very next step was Admonitions to the Parliament against the whole Government Ecclesiastical: then came out Volumes in English and Latin in defence of their Tenets: and immediately, practices were set on foot to erect their discipline without Authority. Those not succeeding, Satyre and Rayling was the next: And *Martin Mar-Prelate* (the *Marvel* of those times) was the first Presbyterian Scribler, who sanctify'd Libels and Scurrility to the use of the Good Old Cause. Which was done (says my Authour) upon this account; that (their serious Treatises having been fully answered and refuted) they might compass by railing what they had lost by reasoning; and when their Cause was sunk in Court and Parliament, they might at least hedge in a stake amongst the Rabble: for to their ignorance all things are Wit which are abusive; but if Church and State were made the Theme, then the Doctoral Degree of Wit was to be taken at *Billingsgate*: even the most Saintlike of the Party, though they durst not excuse this contempt and villifying of the Government, yet were pleas'd, and grin'd at it with a pious smile: and call'd it a judgment of God against the Hierarchy. Thus Sectaries, we may see, were born with teeth, foul-mouth'd and scurrilous from their Infancy: and if Spiritual Pride, Venome, Violence, Contempt of Superiours and Slander had been the marks of Orthodox Belief; the Presbytery and the rest

of our Schismaticks, which are their Spawn, were always the most visible Church in the Christian World.

'Tis true, the Government was too strong at that time for a Rebellion; but to shew what proficiency they had made in *Calvin*'s School, even *Then* their mouths water'd at it: for two of their gifted Brotherhood (*Hacket* and *Coppinger*) as the Story tells us, got up into a Pease-Cart, and harangued the People, to dispose them to an insurrection, and to establish their Discipline by force: so that however it comes about, that now they celebrate Queen *Elizabeths* Birth-night, as that of their Saint and Patroness; yet then they were for doing the work of the Lord by Arms against her; and in all probability, they wanted but a Fanatique Lord Mayor and two Sheriffs of their Party to have compass'd it.

Our venerable *Hooker*, after many Admonitions which he had given them, toward the end of his Preface, breaks out into this Prophetick speech. "*There is in every one of these Considerations most just cause to fear* "*lest our hastiness to embrace a thing of so perilous Consequence* (meaning the "Presbyterian Discipline) *should cause Posterity to feel those Evils, which as* "*yet are more easy for us to prevent, than they would be for them to remedy.*

How fatally this *Cassandra* has foretold we know too well by sad experience: the Seeds were sown in the time of Queen *Elizabeth*, the bloudy Harvest ripened in the Reign of King *Charles* the Martyr: and because all the Sheaves could not be carried off, without shedding some of the loose Grains, another Crop is too like to follow; nay I fear 'tis unavoidable if the Conventiclers be permitted still to scatter.

A man may be suffer'd to quote an Adversary to our Religion, when he speaks Truth: and 'tis the observation of *Meimbourg* in his History of Calvinism, that where-ever that Discipline was planted and embrac'd, Rebellion, Civil-War and Misery attended it. And how indeed should it happen otherwise? Reformation of Church and State has always been the ground of our Divisions in *England*. While we were Papists, our Holy Father rid us, by pretending authority out of the Scriptures to depose Princes, when we shook off his Authority, the Sectaries furnish'd themselves with the same Weapons; and out of the same Magazine, the Bible. So that the Scriptures, which are in themselves the greatest security of Governours, as commanding express obedience to them, are now turn'd to their destruction: and never since the Reformation has there wanted a Text of their interpreting to authorize a Rebel. And 'tis to be noted by the way, that the Doctrines of King-killing and Deposing, which have been taken up onely by the worst Party of the Papists, the most frontless Flatterers of the Pope's Authority, have been espous'd, defended, and are still maintain'd by the whole Body

Body of Nonconformists and Republicans. 'Tis but dubbing themselves the People of God, which 'tis the interest of their Preachers to tell them they are, and their own interest to believe; and after that, they cannot dip into the Bible, but one Text or onother will turn up for their purpose: If they are under Persecution (as they call it) then that is a mark of their Election; if they flourish, then God works Miracles for their Deliverance, and the Saints are to possess the Earth.

They may think themselves to be too roughly handled in this Paper; but I who know best how far I could have gon on this Subject, must be bold to tell them they are spar'd: though at the same time I am not ignorant that they interpret the mildness of a Writer to them, as they do the mercy of the Government; in the one they think it fear, and conclude it weakness in the other. The best way for them to confute me, is, as I before advis'd the Papists, to disclaim their Principles, and renounce their Practices. We shall all be glad to think them true Englishmen when they obey the King, and true Protestants when they conform to the Church Discipline.

It remains that I acquaint the Reader, that the Verses were written for an ingenious young Gentleman my Friend; upon his Translation of *The Critical History of the Old Testament*, compos'd by the learned Father *Simon*: The Verses therefore are address'd to the Translatour of that Work, and the style of them is, what it ought to be, Epistolary.

If any one be so lamentable a Critick as to require the Smoothness, the Numbers and the Turn of Heroick Poetry in this Poem; I must tell him, that if he has not read *Horace*, I have studied him, and hope the style of his Epistles is not ill imitated here. The Expressions of a Poem, design'd purely for Instruction, ought to be Plain and Natural, and yet Majestick: for here the Poet is presum'd to be a kind of Law-giver, and those three qualities which I have nam'd are proper to the Legislative style. The Florid, Elevated and Figurative way is for the Passions; for Love and Hatred, Fear and Anger, are begotten in the Soul by shewing their Objects out of their true proportion; either greater than the Life, or less; but Instruction is to be given by shewing them what they naturally are. A Man is to be cheated into Passion, but to be reason'd into Truth.

TO

TO

Mr. Dryden,

On his POEM, called

RELIGIO LAICI.

GReat is the task, and worthy ſuch a Muſe,
To do Faith right, yet Reaſon diſabuſe.
How chearfully the Soul does take its flight,
On Faith's ſtrong wings guided by Reaſon's light?
But Reaſon does in vain her beams diſplay,
Shewing to th' place, whence firſt ſhe came, the way,
If Peter's *Heirs muſt ſtill hold faſt the Key.*
The houſe which many Manſions ſhou'd contain,
Form'd by the great wiſe Architect in vain,
Of Diſproportion juſtly we accuſe,
If the ſtreight-gate ſtill entrance muſt refuſe.
The only free enriching Port God made
What ſhameful Monopoly did invade?
One Factious Company ingroſs'd the Trade.

Thou

Thou to the distant Shore hast safely sail'd,
Where the best Pilates have so often fail'd.
Freely we now may buy the Pearl of Price,
The happy Land abounds with fragrant Spice,
And nothing is forbidden there but Vice.
Thou best Columbus *to the unknown World!*
Mountains of Doubt that in thy way were hurld,
Thy generous Faith has bravely overcome,
And made Heaven truly our familiar home.
Let Crowds impossibilities receive,
Who cannot think, ought not to disbelieve.
Let 'em pay Tithes, and hud-wink'd go to Heaven,
But sure the Quaker *cou'd not be forgiven,*
Had not the Clerk who hates Lay-Policy
Found out, to countervail the Injury,
Swearing, *a trade of which they are not free.*
Too long has captiv'd Reason been enslav'd,
By Visions scar'd, and airy Phantasms brav'd,
Listning t' each proud Enthusiastick Fool,
Pretending Conscience, but designing Rule;
Whilst Law, Form, Interest, Ignorance, Design,
Did in the holy Cheat together joyn.
Like vain Astrologers gazing on the Skies,
We fell, and did not dare to trust our Eyes.
'Tis time at last to fix the trembling Soul,
And by thy Compass to point out the Pole;
All men agree in what is to be done,
And each Man's Heart his Table is of Stone,

Where

Where he the God-writ Character may view:
Were it as needful, Faith had been so too.
Oh, that our greatest fault were humble Doubt!
And that we were more Just, though less Devout;
What reverence shou'd we pay thy sacred Rhimes,
Who in these Factious too-believing Times
Hast taught us to obey, and to distrust:
Yet to our selves, our King, and God, prove just.
Thou wantst not Praise from an ensuring Friend,
The Poor to Thee on double Interest lend.
So strong thy Reasons, and so clear thy Sense,
They bring, like Day, their own bright Evidence:
Yet whilst mysterious Truths to light you bring,
And heavenly things in heavenly numbers sing,
The joyful Younger Choir may clap the Wing.

To Mr. DRYDEN, on

Religio Laici.

'Tis nobly done, a Layman's Creed profest,
When all our Faith of late hung on a Priest;
His doubtful words like Oracles receiv'd,
And when we could not understand, believ'd,

Trium-

Triumphant Faith now takes a nobler course,
'Tis gentle, but resists intruding force:
Weak Reason may pretend an awful sway,
And Consistories charge her to obey;
(Strange Nonsense to confine the sacred Dove,
And narrow Rules prescribe how she shall love,
And how upon the barren Waters move.)
But she rejects and scorns their proud Pretence,
And whilst those groveling things depend on Sense;
She mounts on certain wings and flys on high,
And looks upon a dazling Mystery,
With fixt, and steddy, and an Eagles Eye.
Great King of Verse, that dost instruct and please,
As Orpheus *soften'd the rude Savages:*
And gently freest us from a double Care,
The bold Socinion, and the Papal Chair:
Thy Judgment is correct, thy Fancy young,
Thy Numbers, as thy generous faith, are strong:
Whilst through dark Prejudice they force their way,
Our Souls shake off the Night and view the Day.
We live secure from mad Enthusiasts Rage,
And fond Tradition now grown blind with Age.
Let factious and ambitious Souls repine,
Thy Reason's strong, and generous thy Design,
And always to do well is only thine.

Tho. Creech.

Religio Laici.

DIM, as the borrow'd beams of Moon and Stars
To *lonely*, *weary*, *wandring* Travellers,
Is *Reason* to the *Soul*: and as on high,
Those rowling Fires *discover* but the Sky
Not light us *here*; So *Reason*'s glimmering Ray
Was lent not to *assure* our *doubtful* way,
But *guide* us upward to a *better Day*.
And as those nightly Tapers disappear
When Day's bright Lord ascends our Hemisphere;
So pale grows *Reason* at *Religions* Sight:
So *dyes*, and so *dissolves* in *Supernatural Light*.

Some few, whose Lamp shone brighter, have been led
From Cause to Cause, to *Natures* secret Head;
And found that *one first Principle* must be:
But *what*, or *who*, that *UNIVERSAL HE*;
Whether some *Soul* incompassing this Ball
Unmade, unmov'd; yet *making, moving all*;
Or various *Atom's*, interfering Dance
Leapt into *Form* (the Noble work of *Chance*;)
Or this great *All* was from *Eternity*;
Not even the *Stagirite* himself could see;
And *Epicurus Guess'd* as well as He:
As *blindly grop'd* they for a *future State*;
As *rashly Judg'd* of *Providence* and *Fate*:
But least of all could their Endeavours find
What most concern'd the good of Humane kind.
For *Happiness* was never to be found;
But vanish'd from 'em, like Enchanted Ground.

Opinions of the several Sects of Philosophers concerning the Summum Bonum.

One

One thought *Content* the Good to be enjoy'd:
This, every little *Accident* destroy'd:
The *wiser Madmen* did for *Vertue* toyl:
A Thorny, or at best a barren Soil:
In *Pleasure* some their glutton Souls would steep;
But found their Line too short, the Well too deep;
And leaky Vessels which no *Bliss* cou'd keep.
Thus *anxeous Thoughts* in *endless Circles* roul,
Without a *Centre* where to fix the *Soul*:
In this wild Maze their vain Endeavours end
How can the *less* the *Greater* comprehend?
Or *finite Reason* reach *Infinity*?
For what cou'd *Fathom GOD* were *more* than *He*.

The *Deist* thinks he stands on firmer ground; *Systeme of Deisme.*
Cries εὕρηκα the mighty Secret's found:
God is that *Spring* of *Good*; *Supreme*, and *Best*;
We, made to *serve*, and in that Service *blest*;

If ſo, ſome *Rules* of Worſhip muſt be given;
Diſtributed alike to all by Heaven:
Elſe *God* were *partial*, and to *ſome* deny'd
The means his Juſtice ſhou'd for all provide.
This *general Worship* is to PRAISE, and PRAY:
One part to *borrow* Bleſſings, one to *pay*:
And when frail Nature ſlides into *Offence*,
The *Sacrifice* for *Crimes* is *Penitence*.
Yet, ſince th'Effects of Providence, we find
Are variouſly diſpens'd to Human kind;
That *Vice Triumphs*, and *Vertue ſuffers* here,
(A Brand that Sovereign Juſtice cannot bear;)
Our Reaſon prompts us to a *future* State:
The *laſt Appeal* from *Fortune*, and from *Fate*:
Where God's all-righteous ways will be declar'd;
The *Bad* meet *Punishment*, the *Good*, *Reward*.

Thus

Thus Man by his own Strength to Heaven wou'd
And wou'd not be Oblig'd to God for more. (ſoar: *Of Reveal'd Religion.*
Vain, wretched Creature, how art thou miſled
To think thy Wit theſe God-like Notions bred!
Theſe Truths are not the Product of thy Mind,
But dropt from Heaven, and of a Nobler kind.
Reveal'd Religion firſt inform'd thy Sight,
And *Reaſon* ſaw not, till *Faith* ſprung the Light.
Hence all thy *Natural Worſhip* takes the *Source*:
'Tis *Revelation* what thou thinkſt *Diſcourſe*.
Elſe how com'ſt *Thou* to ſee theſe truths ſo clear,
Which ſo obſcure to *Heathens* did appear?
Not *Plato* theſe, nor *Ariſtotle* found:
Nor He whoſe Wiſdom *Oracles* renown'd. *Socrates*
Haſt thou a Wit ſo deep, or ſo ſublime,
Or canſt thou lower dive, or higher climb?

Canst *Thou*, by *reason*, more of *God-head* know
Than *Plutarch*, *Seneca*, or *Cicero*?
Those Gyant Wits, in happier Ages born,
(VVhen *Arms*, and *Arts* did *Greece* and *Rome* adorn)
Knew no such *Systeme*: no such Piles cou'd raise
Of *Natural VVorship*, built on *Pray'r* and *Praise*,
To one sole GOD.
Nor did Remorse, to Expiate Sin, prescribe:
But slew their fellow Creatures for a Bribe:
The guiltless *Victim* groan'd for their Offence;
And *Cruelty*, aud *Blood* was *Penitence*.
If *Sheep* and *Oxen* cou'd attone for Men
Ah! at how cheap a rate the *Rich* might Sin!
And great Oppressours might Heavens Wrath beguile
By offering his own Creatures for a Spoil!

Dar'st thou, poor VVorm, offend *Infinity*?
And must the Terms of Peace be given by *Thee*?

Then

Then *Thou* art *Justice* in the *last Appeal*;
Thy easy God instructs thee to *rebell*:
And, like a King remote, and weak, must take
What Satisfaction *Thou* art pleas'd to make.

But if there be a *Pow'r* too *Just*, and *strong*
To wink at *Crimes*, and bear unpunish'd *Wrong*;
Look humbly upward, see his VVill disclose
The *Forfeit* first, and then the *Fine* impose:
A *Mulct thy* Poverty could never pay
Had not *Eternal Wisdom* found the way:
And with Cœlestial VVealth supply'd thy Store:
His Justice makes the *Fine*, *his Mercy* quits the *Score*.
See God descending in thy Humane Frame;
Th' *offended*, suffring in th' *Offenders* Name:
All thy Misdeeds to him imputed see;
And all his Righteousness devolv'd on thee.

For granting we have Sin'd, and that th'offence
Of *Man*, is made againſt *Omnipotence*,
Some Price, that bears *proportion*, muſt be paid;
And *Infinite* with *Infinite* be weigh'd.
See then the *Deiſt loſt*: *Remorſe* for *Vice*,
Not paid, or *paid*, *inadequate* in price:
What farther means can *Reaſon* now direct,
Or what Relief from *human Wit* expect?
That ſhews us *ſick*; and ſadly are we ſure
Still to be *Sick*, till *Heav'n* reveal the *Cure*:
If then *Heaven's Will* muſt needs be underſtood,
(Which muſt, if we want *Cure*, and *Heaven*, be *Good*)
Let all Records of *Will reveal'd* be ſhown;
With *Scripture*, all in equal ballance thrown,
And *our one Sacred Book* will be *That one*.

Proof needs not here, for whether we compare
That Impious, Idle, Superſtitious Ware

Of

Of *Rites*, *Luſtrations*, *Offerings*, (which before,
In various Ages, various Countries bore)
With *Chriſtian Faith* and *Vertues*, we ſhall find
None anſw'ring the great ends of humane kind
But *This one Rule of Life*: *That* ſhews us beſt
How *God* may be *appeas'd*, and *Mortals bleſt*.
Whether from length of *Time* its worth we draw,
The *World* is ſcarce more *Ancient* than the *Law*:
Heav'ns early Care preſcrib'd for every Age;
Firſt, in the *Soul*, and after, in the *Page*.
Or, whether more abſtractedly we look,
Or on the *Writers*, or the *written Book*,
Whence, but from *Heav'n*, cou'd Men unskill'd in arts,
In ſeveral Ages born, in ſeveral parts,
Weave ſuch *agreeing Truths*? or *how*, or *why*
Shou'd *all* conſpire to cheat us with a *Lye*?
Unask'd their *Pains*, *ungrateful* their *Advice*,
Starving their *Gain*, and *Martyrdom* their *Price*.

If on the Book it ſelf we caſt our view,
Concurrent Heathens prove the Story *True* :
The *Doctrine*, *Miracles* ; which muſt convince,
For *Heav'n* in *Them* appeals to *humane Senſe* :
And though they *prove* not, they *Confirm* the Cauſe,
When what is *Taught* agrees with *Natures Laws*.

Then for the *Style* ; *Majeſtick* and *Divine*,
It ſpeaks no leſs than God in every Line :
Commanding words ; whoſe *Force* is ſtill the ſame
As the firſt *Fiat* that produc'd our Frame.
All Faiths *beſide*, or did by *Arms* aſcend ;
Or *Senſe* indulg'd has made *Mankind* their *Friend* :
This *only* Doctrin does our *Luſts* oppoſe :
Unfed by Natures Soil, in which it grows ;
Croſs to our *Intereſts*, curbing Senſe, and Sin ;
Oppreſs'd without, and undermin'd within,

It

It thrives through pain; its own Tormentors tires;
And with a ſtubborn patience ſtill aſpires.
To what can *Reaſon* ſuch Effects aſſign
Tranſcending *Nature*, but to *Laws Divine*:
Which in that Sacred Volume are contain'd;
Sufficient, clear, and for that uſe ordain'd.

But ſtay: the *Deiſt* here will urge anew, *Objection of the Deiſt.*
No *Supernatural Worſhip* can be *True*:
Becauſe a *general Law* is that alone
Which muſt to *all*, and every *where* be known:
A Style ſo large as not *this* Book can claim
Nor ought that bears *reveal'd* Religions *Name*.
'Tis ſaid the ſound of a *Meſſiah's Birth*
Is gone through all the habitable Earth:
But ſtill that Text muſt be confin'd alone
To what was *Then* inhabited, and known:

And what Provision cou'd from *thence* accrue
To *Indian* Souls, and Worlds discover'd *New*?
In other parts it helps, that Ages past,
The Scriptures there were *known*, and were *imbrac'd*,
Till Sin spread once again the Shades of Night:
What's that to these who never *saw* the Light?

The Objection answered.

Of all Objections this indeed is chief
To startle Reason, stagger frail Belief:
We grant, 'tis true, that Heav'n from humane Sense
Has hid the secret Paths of *Providence*:
But *boundless Wisdom*, *boundless Mercy*, may
Find ev'n for those *be-wildred* Souls, a *way*:
If from his *Nature Foes* may Pity claim,
Much more may *Strangers* who ne'er heard his *Name*.
And though *no Name* be for *Salvation* known,
But that of his *Eternal Sons* alone;

Who

Who knows how far transcending Goodness can
Extend the *Merits* of *that Son* to *Man* ?
Who knows what *Reasons* may his *Mercy* lead ;
Or *Ignorance invincible* may plead ?
Not only *Charity* bids hope the *best*,
But *more* the great Apostle has exprest :
That, if the Gentiles (whom no Law inspir'd,)
By Nature did what was by *Law requir'd* ;
They, who the written Rule had never known,
Were to themselves both Rule and Law alone :
To Natures plain Indictment they shall plead ;]
And, by their Conscience, be condemn'd or freed.
Most righteous Doom ! because a *Rule reveal'd*
Is none to *Those*, from whom it was *conceal'd*.
Then those who follow'd *Reasons* Dictates right ;
Liv'd up, and lifted high their *Natural Light* ;
With *Socrates* may see their Maker's Face,
While Thousand *Rubrick-Martyrs* want a place.

Nor does it baulk my *Charity*, to find
Th' *Egyptian* Bishop of another mind :
For, though his *Creed Eternal Truth* contains,
'Tis hard for *Man* to doom to *endless Pains*
All who believ'd not all, his Zeal requir'd ;
Unless he first cou'd prove he was inspir'd.
Then let us either think he meant to say
This Faith, where *publish'd*, was the only way ;
Or else conclude that, *Arius* to confute,
The good old Man, too eager in dispute,
Flew high ; and as his *Christian* Fury rose
Damn'd all for *Hereticks* who durst *oppose*

Arius of Lybia & founder of Arianism, sect who denied the Eternal Divinity & Consubstantiality of [illegible] was, live in y fourth Century. He was born in Lybia near Egypt. Eusebius Bishop of Nicomedia much in favour with Constantia, Sister of y Emperor Constantine & Wife of Licinius contributed greatly to y propagation of y heresy. Vide Bayle Critical & Hist: Dictionary Colle: Image 45

Thus far my Charity this path has try'd ;
(A much unskilful, but well meaning guide :)
Yet what they are, ev'n these crude thoughts were bred
By reading that, which better thou hast read.

Digression to the Translator of Father Simon's Critical History of the Old Testament.

Thy

Thy Matchless Author's work: which thou, my Friend,
By well translating better dost commend:
Those youthful hours which, of thy Equals most
In *Toys* have *squander'd*, or in *Vice* have *lost*,
Those hours hast thou to Nobler use employ'd;
And the severe Delights of Truth enjoy'd.
Witness this weighty Book, in which appears
The crabbed Toil of many thoughtful years,
Spent by thy Authour, in the Sifting Care
Of *Rabbins* old Sophisticated Ware
From Gold Divine; which he who well can sort
May afterwards make *Algebra* a Sport.
A Treasure, which if *Country-Curates* buy,
They *Junius* and *Tremellius* may defy:
Save pains in various readings, and Translations;
And without *Hebrew* make most learn'd quotations.
A work so full with various Learning fraught,
So nicely pondred, yet so strongly wrought,

As

As Natures height and Arts laſt hand requir'd:
As much as Man cou'd compaſs, uninſpir'd.
Where we may ſee what *Errours* have been made
Both in the *Copiers* and *Tranſlaters Trade*:
How *Jewiſh*, *Popish*, Intereſts have prevail'd,
And where *Infallibility* has *fail'd*.

For ſome, who have his ſecret meaning ghes'd,
Have found our Author not too *much* a *Prieſt*:
For *Faſhion-ſake* he ſeems to have recourſe
To *Pope*, and *Councils*, and *Traditions* force:
But he that *old* Traditions cou'd ſubdue,
Cou'd not but find the weakneſs of the *New*:
If *Scripture*, though deriv'd from *Heavenly Birth*,
Has been but careleſly preſerv'd on *Earth*;
If *God's own People*, who of *God* before
Knew what we know, and had been promis'd more,

In

In fuller Terms, of Heaven's assisting Care,
And who did neither *Time*, nor *Study* spare
To keep this Book *untainted*, *unperplext*;
Let in gross *Errours* to corrupt the *Text*:
Omitted *Paragraphs*, embroyl'd the *Sense*;
With vain *Traditions* stopt the gaping Fence,
Which every common hand pull'd up with ease:
What Safety from such *brushwood-helps* as these?
If *written words* from time are not secur'd,
How can we think have *oral Sounds* endur'd?
Which *thus* transmitted, if *one* Mouth has fail'd,
Immortal Lyes on *Ages* are intail'd:
And that some such have been, is prov'd too plain;
If we consider *Interest*, *Church*, and *Gain*.

Of the Infallibility of Tradition, in General.

Oh but says one, *Tradition* set aside,
Where can we hope for an *unerring Guid*?

For ſince th' *original* Scripture has been loſt,
All Copies *diſagreeing*, *maim'd* the *moſt*,
Or *Chriſtian Faith* can have no *certain* ground,
Or *Truth* in *Church Tradition* muſt be found.

Such an *Omniſcient* Church we wiſh indeed;
'Twere worth *Both Teſtaments*, and caſt in the *Creed*:
But if *this Mother* be a *Guide* ſo ſure,
As can all *doubts reſolve*, all *truth ſecure*;
Then her *Infallibility*, as well
Where Copies are *corrupt*, or *lame*, can tell?
Reſtore *loſt Canon* with as little Pains,
As *truly explicate* what ſtill *remains*:
VVhich yet no *Council* dare *pretend* to do;
Unleſs like *Eſdras*, they cou'd *write* it new:
Strange Confidence, ſtill to *interpret* true,
Yet not be ſure that all they have explain'd,
Is in the bleſt *Original* contain'd.

More

More Safe, and much more modeſt 'tis, to ſay
God wou'd not leave Mankind without a way:
And that the *Scriptures*, though not *every where*
Free from Corruption, or intire, or clear,
Are uncorrupt, ſufficient, clear, intire,
In *all* things which our needful *Faith* require.
If *others* in the *ſame Glaſs better* ſee
'Tis for *Themſelves* they look, but not for *me*:
For MY Salvation muſt it's Doom receive
Not from what OTHERS, but what *I* believe.

Objection in behalf of Tradition urg'd by Father Simon.

Muſt *all Tradition* then be ſet aſide?
This to affirm were Ignorance, or Pride.
Are there not many points, ſome needful ſure
To ſaving Faith, that Scripture leaves obſcure?
Which every Sect will wreſt a ſeveral way
(For what *one* Sect Interprets, *all* Sects *may*:)

We hold, and ſay we prove from Scripture plain,
That *Chriſt* is *G O D*; the bold *Socinian*
From the *ſame* Scripture urges he's but *MAN*.
Now what Appeal can end th' important Suit;
Both parts *talk* loudly, but the *Rule* is *mute*?

Shall I ſpeak plain, and in a Nation free
Aſſume an honeſt *Layman's Liberty*?
I think (according to my little Skill,)
To my own Mother-Church ſubmitting ſtill)
That many have been ſav'd, and many may,
Who never heard this Queſtion brought in play.
Th'*unletter'd* Chriſtian, who believes in *groſs*,
Plods on to *Heaven*; and n'er is at a loſs:
For the *Streight-gate* wou'd be made *ſtreighter* yet,
Were *none* admitted there but men of *Wit*.
The few, by Nature form'd, with Learning fraught,
Born to inſtruct, as others to be taught,

Muſt

Must Study well the Sacred Page; and see
Which Doctrine, this, or that, does best agree
With the whole Tenour of the Work Divine:
And plainlyest points to Heaven's reveal'd Design:
Which Exposition flows from *genuine Sense*;
And which is *forc'd* by *Wit* and *Eloquence*.
Not that Traditions parts are useless here:
When general, old, disinteress'd and clear:
That Antient Fathers thus expound the Page,
Gives *Truth* the reverend Majesty of *Age*:
Confirms its force, by biding every *Test*;
For best *Authority's* next *Rules* are *best*.
And still the nearer to the Spring we go
More limpid, more unsoyl'd the Waters flow:
Thus, *first Traditions* were a proof alone;
Cou'd we be *certain* such they *were*, so *known*:
But since some Flaws in long descent may be,
They make not *Truth* but *Probability*.

Even

Even *Arius* and *Pelagius* durſt provoke
To what the *Centuries preceding* ſpoke.
Such difference is there in an oft-told Tale:
But Truth by its own Sinews will prevail.
Tradition written therefore more commends
Authority, than what ſtom *Voice* deſcends:
And this, as perfect as its kind can be,
Rouls down to us the Sacred Hiſtory:
VVhich, from the *Univerſal Church receiv'd*,
Is *try'd*, and *after*, for its *ſelf* believ'd.

The Second Objection.

The partial *Papiſts* wou'd infer from hence
Their Church, in laſt reſort, ſhou'd Judge the *Senſe*.

Anſwer to the Objection.

But firſt they wou'd aſſume, with wondrous Art,
Themſelves to be the *whole*, who are but *part*
Of that vaſt Frame, the Church; yet grant they were
The handers down, can they from thence infer

A right t'interpret? or wou'd they alone
Who brought the Present, claim it for their own?
The *Book*'s a *Common Largess* to Mankind;
Not more for *them*, than *every* Man design'd:
The *welcome News* is in the *Letter* found;
The *Carrier*'s not Commission'd to *expound*.
It speaks it *Self*, and what it does contain,
In all things *needful* to be known, is plain.

In times o'ergrown with Rust and Ignorance,
A gainful Trade their Clergy did advance:
When want of Learning kept the *Laymen* low,
And none but *Priests* were *Authoriz'd* to *know*:
When what small Knowledg was, in them did dwell;
And he a *God* who could but *Read* or *Spell*;
Then *Mother Church* did mightily prevail:
She parcel'd out the Bible by *retail*:

But

But ſtill *expounded* what She *ſold* or gave;
To keep it in *her Power* to *Damn* and *Save*:
Scripture was *ſcarce*, and as the Market went,
Poor *Laymen* took *Salvation* on *Content*;
As needy men take Money, good or bad:
God's Word they had not, but the *Prieſts* they had.
Yet, whate'er *falſe Conveyances* they made,
The *Lawyer* ſtill was *certain* to be paid.
In thoſe dark times they learn'd their knack ſo well,
That by long uſe they grew *Infallible*:
At laſt, a knowing Age began t'enquire
If *they* the *Book*, or *That* did *them* inſpire:
And, making narrower ſearch they found, tho late,
That what they thought the *Prieſt*'s, was *Their* Eſtate:
Taught by the *Will produc'd*, (the written Word)
How long they had been *cheated* on *Record*.
Then, every man who ſaw the Title fair,
Claim'd a Child's part, and put in for a Share:

Conſulted

Consulted Soberly his private good;
And sav'd himself as cheap as e'er he cou'd.

'Tis true, my Friend, (and far be Flattery hence)
This good had full as bad a Consequence:
The Book thus put in every vulgar hand,
Which each presum'd he best cou'd understand,
The *Common Rule* was made the *common Prey*;
And at the mercy of the *Rabble* lay.
The tender Page with horney Fists was gaul'd;
And he was gifted most that loudest baul'd:
The *Spirit* gave the *Doctoral Degree*:
And every member of a *Company*
Was of *his Trade*, and of the *Bible free*.
Plain *Truths* enough for needful *use* they found;
But men wou'd still be itching to *expound*:
Each was ambitious of th' obscurest place,
No measure ta'n from *Knowledg*, all from *GRACE*.

Study and *Pains* were now no more their Care :
Texts were explain'd by *Fasting*, and by *Prayer* :
This was the Fruit the *private Spirit* brought ;
Occasion'd by *great Zeal*, and *little Thought.*
While Crouds unlearn'd, with rude Devotion warm,
About the Sacred Viands buz and swarm,
The *Fly-blown Text* creates a *crawling Brood* ;
And turns to *Maggots* what was meant for *Food.*
A Thousand daily Sects rise up, and dye ;
A Thousand more the perish'd Race supply :
So all we make of Heavens discover'd Will
Is, not to have it, or to use it ill.
The Danger's much the same ; on several Shelves
If *others* wreck *us*, or *we* wreck our *selves*.

What then remains, but, waving each Extreme,
The Tides of Ignorance ; and Pride to stem ?

Neither

Neither ſo rich a Treaſure to forego;
Nor proudly ſeek beyond our Pow'r to know:
Faith is not built on diſquiſitions vain;
The things we *muſt* believe, are *few*, and *plain*:
But ſince men *will* believe more than they *need*;
And every man will make *himſelf* a Creed:
In doubtful queſtions 'tis the ſafeſt way
To learn what unſuſpected Antients ſay:
For 'tis not likely *we* ſhou'd higher Soar
In ſearch of Heav'n, than *all the Church before*:
Nor can we be deceiv'd, unleſs we ſee
The *Scripture*, and the *Fathers diſagree*.
If after all, they ſtand ſuſpected ſtill,
(For no man's Faith depends upon his Will;)
'Tis ſome Relief, that points not clearly known,
Without much hazard may be let alone:
And, after hearing what our Church can ſay,
If ſtill our Reaſon runs another way,

That

That private Reason 'tis more Just to curb,
Than by Disputes the publick Peace disturb :
For points obscure are of small use to learn :
But *Common quiet* is *Mankind's Concern.*

Thus have I made my own Opinions clear :
Yet neither Praise expect, nor Censure fear :
And this unpolish'd, rugged Verse, I chose ;
As fittest for Discourse, and nearest Prose :
For, while from *Sacred Truth* I do not swerve,
Tom Sternhold's, or *Tom Sha---ll's Rhimes* will serve.

FINIS.

LICENSED.

April the 11th, 1657.